



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

DEPARTMENT OF NURSING EDUCATION

IN CHARGE OF

ISABEL M. STEWART, R.N.

Collaborators: S. LILLIAN CLAYTON AND ANNA C. JAMME

TESTING THE NURSING SPIRIT

In this anxious and critical time, when we are so intent upon counting up national assets, and so carefully gauging the power of each of the great armies not only to hold out, but to win a decisive victory in the field, the question of what after all makes one army superior to another, and what are the essential qualities of a good soldier are matters of constant analysis and debate. Technical skill is of course taken for granted, intelligence and initiative are beginning to be recognized as fundamental, but the thing which seems to be considered as perhaps the greatest factor in a long drawn out struggle such as this, is the morale of the army, or its spirit. That is why we look with wonder and satisfaction at the still undiminished gaiety and gallantry of the French poilu, and the sturdy courage and tenacity of the British soldier and sailor, for we realize that without these qualities the day would long ago have been lost for the Allies, on the battle fields of Europe.

If armies and navies stand or fall by their morale, it is equally true that the soundness and strength of our nursing body will be judged in the last analysis by the quality of its spirit. This is the vital test of all our teaching and training. We do not underestimate the value of technical efficiency, which comes with careful training, nor the essential importance of intelligence and scientific knowledge, but these alone can never make a good nurse, any more than they make a good soldier or sailor. As nurses, we have always prided ourselves on our professional solidarity, our splendid traditions, and our fine spirit. Certainly no body of men or women can point to a more glorious history. A standard has been created for us which it is not easy to live up to, and so when great crises are to be faced and unusual situations to be met, it is not much marvel that we should all be a little anxious to know how our profession will stand the test.

The war which has been raging in Europe, and which threatens now to engulf this country also, has been a great testing time for institutions and systems of education as well as of manhood and womanhood. Many old traditions and standards have already been shattered

and new ones raised in their place. It is a great opportunity for taking stock of our professional body and finding just how we *do* compare with other groups who are serving, in this national emergency. Our whole system of administration and training, our personnel and our methods will be under the most critical observation, but it will be by our *esprit de corps* more than anything else that we are going to be judged. If we "play the game" as we believe we shall, there ought to be a great increase in recruits for our nursing schools after the war. If we justify our training, the much-needed endowments ought to be forthcoming to put our schools on a more dignified and effective basis. Perhaps as a result of this great national upheaval, the big reforms which we have all been eagerly waiting for will come, as they did after the Crimean war. It is well that we should stop for a moment to consider just what we do expect of the members of our profession in an emergency like this, just what kind of a spirit our nursing schools are breeding and how it ought to show itself under the special conditions facing us.

Fundamentally the nursing spirit is most akin to the mother spirit, because it is from the mother's instinct to protect and nourish and save life that the impulse to care for all weak and helpless human beings comes. This function of conservation is shown most dramatically where we have such a spectacular wasting of life as in the present war. We can almost see the nurse picking up the fragments, hoarding the stores of wasted energy and feeding the flickering flame of life till it glows again. Where great principles are at stake, and men must be raised up to defend them, the salvage corps contributes more than the recruiting agent, because it economizes man power and multiplies reserve strength not only by bringing men back to life but by mitigating the suffering and strengthening the spirit of fighting men. It has been definitely stated that those nations which have had the service of an ample corps of thoroughly trained nurses, have shown a decidedly higher percentage of recoveries and an appreciably shorter average term of convalescence than those which have had to depend on unskilled and undisciplined volunteers. We should be very much surprised and disappointed if such a saving could not be demonstrated by actual statistics, not only because it would help to justify our plea for a trained personnel for all nursing work, but because it would show that the passion for life-saving which has always been the chief characteristic of all our great nurses, is still as potent as ever.

Like her prototype, the mother, the nurse has also shown herself to be a good fighter, especially where the life or welfare of her charge is menaced. We think at once of the knightly orders of the crusades,

whose function it was not only to comfort and relieve the sick, but also to defend and protect them by force of arms, if necessary. This fighting spirit the real nurse must have, though it is usually directed against disease and the conditions that breed it, rather than against the lives of men. We have learned too, to expect of nurses a kind of soldier-like chivalry such as that shown recently by the nurses on a torpedoed transport who refused to accept life-belts from fighting men, and insisted on "Tommies first," in spite of the old rule of the sea. Like soldiers, we expect the nurse to show the Spartan spirit with its contempt for enervating and selfish indulgence, its fearlessness in the face of danger, its hardihood, endurance and daring. It is good to know that in Serbia and in Belgium and wherever men have gone to face death and disease, nurses have gone too, showing the same old hardy adventurous pioneer spirit which took our predecessors always into the field of danger and of need, regardless of personal comfort and safety. Endurance is often much more difficult than daring but our women have stayed at their posts like good soldiers. Some of them, like Edith Cavell, have met death, but we hear of none who have deserted.

We expect the nurse to be patriotic. Patriotism is a virtue which, like many of the others mentioned, is not confined to any single group. In the nurse, however, we expect a readier response to the call of duty, a greater willingness to sink her individuality in a common task, a greater steadfastness and trustworthiness in positions of responsibility, than we find usually among amateur volunteers of equal patriotic devotion, but without the long experience in meeting critical situations and the ready subordination of self which is essential to good coöperation. Many of these qualities we draw from our soldierly traditions and training but we have a great many traditions which come from a very different source. For many centuries the religious orders were almost the sole representatives of the nursing spirit, and the monasteries the only harbors of refuge from the cruelties and turmoil of life. Theirs was the spirit of hospitality, of charity and mercy, which gave comfort, assistance and nursing care to all who came, regardless of race or color or creed. They ministered to friends and enemies alike and, though their motive was not entirely free from self-seeking and narrow sectarianism, they showed a spirit of democracy, and fraternity which has been a constant inspiration and example to those who have come after them. It has been a matter of great pride that, through all the passions and prejudices aroused by war, nurses and physicians of all nations have been able to maintain so well these traditions of impartial and disinterested service, and professional fellowship. It gives us

more faith in the final triumph of that world spirit of internationalism which we all look to see in the near future. This spirit of good will and good fellowship is perhaps most severely tested in the everyday relationships of life, especially in the conflicting ideals and methods of different schools and the customs of different countries. A generous tolerance for human frailties and peculiarities and a spirit of loyalty to professional colleagues as well as to assistants, is expected of nurses as one of the by-products of our training. There is no room for pettiness or snobbery in such a democracy as we represent.

There is another tradition which we owe to the religious orders. It is suggested in the name of "sister," which their members still bear, and which European nurses generally retained after the secular system was established. I hope the name may come back into current use among our nurses because it serves to emphasize a kind of relationship between the woman-nurse and the man-patient, which is unique and perhaps apt to be overlooked. In older and more barbarous times it was necessary to wrap the nurse round with a special robe of sanctity, and to hedge her about with vows and prohibitions, in order that she might carry on her work with safety and dignity and might continue to retain public confidence in her moral character. The failure of the secular nurse of the servant type to maintain self-respect and moral integrity, was considered conclusive evidence that some form of vow or religious taboo alone could meet the special moral dangers in the situation. We owe it to Florence Nightingale and the splendid women who followed her, that this danger and disgrace have been so largely overcome by the building up of a new type of relationship, which we have come to call the professional as distinguished from the religious or the servile or the ordinary personal relationship. It is based partly on a very high conception of responsibility and integrity, and partly on the idea of the family relationship which is expressed in the title of "sister." Such a relationship is not incompatible with good friendship and mutual confidence but any suggestion of romantic philandering or sex-adventure destroys its whole meaning and tears down the carefully built-up structure on which public confidence and professional integrity rest. That is why we cannot tolerate in a nurse the deliberate exploitation of personal charms or the employment of stage or ball-room arts which we would overlook in an actress or even in a society debutante. Like that of Caesar's wife, the nurse's character must be beyond suspicion. We are full of indignation at the much-advertised exploits of the young amateur nurse, who has shown herself to be too often, merely a thinly-disguised matrimonial adventuress, but it is easier to find an excuse for her than for the professional

nurse of the same type (fortunately rare) who allows her emotions and sensibilities to obscure her professional duties and her own good sense and who thoughtlessly perhaps, but nevertheless surely, brings discredit on the whole nursing body.

During a time of great emotional excitement when sentimentality is bound to run riot, there is a special call for cool-headed, wholesome, fine-fibred women to create an atmosphere of dignity and sanity in hospital wards and military camps. Much of this responsibility will necessarily rest with nurses. The mania for publicity and self-advertising which has brought so much deserved public criticism on so-called "war" nurses is another thing we will have to fight. It is absolutely foreign to the real nursing spirit. From our friends in the medical profession, nurses have learned to distrust and despise all those forms of advertising which we so generally associate with quackery, charlatanism and a cheap desire to figure in the public eye. It is gratifying to know that in all these respects in spite of many temptations and many extremely trying situations, professional nurses have on the whole so well avoided the limelight and laid themselves open to so little criticism. But there is still room for improvement.

If there were space, I might speak of the social or humanitarian spirit which shows itself in constructive, public-spirited effort to improve social conditions, the religious spirit which is marked by a high type devotion to moral ends and reverence for the deeper and more spiritual things of life, the scientific spirit which is characterized by a spirit of inquiry, a devotion to truth, and a hatred of all forms of superstition, dogmatism and quackery. All these we find abundantly exemplified in Florence Nightingale, the finest type of modern nurse we know, and one who represents to us the full flower of the nursing spirit.

It is too early to say just how the whole record will stand when the war is over and our heroes and heroines return. There will be a great gathering up of experiences and impressions, and there will be many thrilling stories to tell. But it will all be of little profit as far as the profession is concerned, unless we are able to sift out all the evidence and find just where we made good and where we failed most conspicuously, where our training has helped us to meet these new and difficult situations and where it has been weak. When we come to look into our whole system of training, there will be many claims for new branches of science and new types of efficiency, but let us not forget the need of strengthening and quickening by all means in our power this vital thing without which all the rest is comparatively futile and barren—the nursing spirit.